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PSYCHIC CAUSES OF RURAL MIGRATION

ERNEST R. GROVES
New Hampshire State College

In modern civilization the increasing attractiveness of the city is one of the apparent social facts.¹ Social psychology may reasonably be expected to throw light upon the causes of this movement of population from rural to urban conditions of life. Striking illustrations of individual preference for city life, even in opposition to the person's economic interests, suggest that this problem of social behavior so characteristic of our time contains important mental factors.

Since sensations give the mind its raw material,² the mind may be said to crave stimulation. "In the most general way of viewing the matter, beings that seem to us to possess minds show in their physical life what we may call a great and discriminating sensitiveness to what goes on at any present time in their environment."³ This interest of the mind in the receiving of stimulation for its own activity is an essential element in any social problem. The individual reacts socially "with a great and discriminating sensitiveness" to his environment, just as he reacts physically to his stimuli to conserve pleasure and avoid pain.

The fundamental sources of stimuli are, of course, common to all forms of social grouping, but one difference between rural and urban life expresses itself in the greater difficulty of obtaining under usual conditions certain definite stimulations from the environment. This fact is assumed both by those who hold the popular belief that most great men are country-born and by those who accept the thesis of Ward that "fecundity in eminent persons seems then to be intimately connected with cities."⁴ The city may be called an

¹ Gillette, *Constructive Rural Sociology*, p. 42.

² Parmelee, *The Science of Human Behavior*, p. 290.

³ Royce, *Outlines of Psychology*, p. 21.

⁴ Ward, *Applied Sociology*, pp. 169-98.

environment of greater quantitative stimulations than the country. The city furnishes forceful, varied, and artificial stimuli; the country affords an environment of stimuli in comparison less strong and more uniform. Minds that crave external, quantitative stimuli for pleasing experiences are naturally attracted by the city and repelled by the monotony of the country. On the other hand, those who find their supreme mental satisfactions in their interpretation or appreciation of the significant expression of the beauty and lawfulness of nature discover what may be called an environment of qualitative stimulations. The city appeals, therefore, to those who with passive attitude need quantitative, external experiences; the country is a splendid opportunity for those who are fitted to create their mental satisfactions from the active working over of stimuli that appear commonplace to the uninterpreting mind. If Coney Island with its noise and manufactured stimulations is representative of the city, White's *Natural History of Selborne* is a characteristic product of the wealth of the country to the mind gifted with penetrating skill.

Doubtless this difference between rural and urban is nothing new, and from the beginning of civilization there have been the country-minded and the city-minded. In our modern life, however, there is much that increases the difference and much that stimulates the movement of the city-minded from the country. Present-day life with its complexity and its rapidity of change makes it difficult for one to get time to develop the active mind that makes appreciation possible. Our children precociously obtain adult experiences of quantitative character in an age of the automobile and moving pictures, and an unnatural craving is created for an environment of excitement, a life reveling in noise and change. Business, eager for gain, exploits this demand for stimulation, and social contagion spreads the restlessness of our population. The urban possibilities for stimulation are advertised as never before in the country by the press with its city point of view, by summer visitors, and by the reports of the successes of the most fortunate of those who have removed to the cities. In an age restless and mobile, with family traditions less strong, and transportation exceedingly cheap and inviting, it is hardly strange that

so many of the young people are eager to leave the country which they pronounce dead—as it literally is to them—for the lively town or city. It is by no means true that this removal always means financial betterment or that such is its motive. It is very significant to find so many farmers who have made their wealth in the country, or who are living on their rents, moving to town to enjoy life. May it not be that a new condition has come about in our day by the possibility that there are more who exhaust their environment in the country before habit with its conservative tendency is able to hold them on the farm? One who knows the discontent of urban-minded people who have continued to live in the country can hardly doubt that habit has tended to conserve the rural population in a way that it does not now. And one must not forget the pressure of the discontent of these urban-minded country parents upon their children. The faculty of any agricultural college is familiar with the farmer's son who has been taught never to return to the farm after graduation from college. That the city-minded preacher and teacher add their contribution to rural restlessness is common thought.

In the city the sharp contrast between labor and recreation increases without doubt the appeal of the city to many. The factory system not only satisfies the gregarious instinct, it also gives an absolute break between the working time and the period of freedom. In so far as labor represents monotony, it emphasizes the value of the hours free from toil. This contrast is often in the city the difference between very great monotony and excessive excitement after working hours. It has been pointed out often that city recreation shows the demand for great contrast between it and the fatigue of monotonous labor. So great a contrast between work and play—monotony and freedom—is not possible in the country environment. In the midst of country recreations there are likely to be suggestions of the preceding work or the work that is to follow. It is as if the city recreations were held in factories. Country places of play are usually in close contact with fields of labor. Often indeed the country town provides the worker with very little opportunity for recreation in any form. In rural places recreation cannot be had at stated periods. Weather or market

conditions must have precedence over the holiday. Recreation therefore cannot be shared as a common experience to such an extent by country workers as is possible in the city. Since the rural population is very largely interested in the same farming problems, even conversation after the work of the day is less free from business concerns than is usually that of city people.

The difficulty of obtaining sharp contrast between work and play in the country no doubt is one reason for the ever-present danger of recourse to the sex instinct for stimulation. One source of excitement is always present ready to give temporary relief to the barren life of young people. Not only of the girl entering prostitution may it be said that with her the sex instinct is less likely "to be reduced in comparative urgency by the volume and abundance of other satisfactions."¹ The barrenness of country life to the girl growing into womanhood, hungry for amusement, is one large reason why the country furnishes so large a proportion of prostitutes to the city.

This civilizational factor of prostitution, the influence of luxury and excitement and refinement in attracting the girl of the people, as the flame attracts the moth, is indicated by the fact that it is the country dwellers who chiefly succumb to the fascination. The girls whose adolescent explosive and orgiastic impulses, sometimes increased by a slight congenital lack of nervous balance, have been latent in the dull monotony of country life and heightened by the spectacle of luxury acting on the unrelieved drudgery of town life, find at last their complete gratification in the career of a prostitute.²

Consideration of the part played in the rural exodus by the nature of the stimuli demanded by the individual for satisfaction or the hope of satisfaction in life suggests that the school is the most efficient instrument for rural betterment. The country environment contains sources of inexhaustible satisfaction for those who have the power to appreciate them. Farming cannot be monotonous to the trained agriculturalist. It is full of dramatic and stimulating interests. Toil is colored by investigation and experiment. The by-products of labor are constant and prized beyond measure by the student and lover of nature. Even the struggle with opposing forces lends zest to the educated farmer's work.

¹ Flexner, *Prostitution in Europe*, p. 72.

² Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, VI, 293.

This does not mean that such a farmer runs a poet's farm, as did Burns, with its inevitable financial failure, but rather that the farmer is a skilled workman with an understanding and interpreting mind. If the farming industry, under proper conditions, could offer no satisfaction to great human instincts it would be strange indeed when one remembers the long period that man has spent in the agricultural stage of culture. City dwellers in their hunt for stimulation are likely to face either the breakdown of physical vitality or the blunting of their sensibilities. Country joys, on the other hand, cost less in the nervous capital expended to obtain them. The urban worker, in thinking of his hours of freedom in sharp contrast with the time spent at his machine, forgets his constant temptation to use most of his surplus income in the satisfying of an unnatural craving for stimulation created by the conditions of his environment. This need not be true of the rural laborer and usually is not.

It is useless to deny the important and wholesome part that the urban life and the city-minded man play in the great social complex which we call modern civilization, but he who would advance country welfare may wisely agitate for country schools fitted to adjust the majority of country children to their environment, that they may as adults live in the country successful and contented lives. We need never fear having too few of the urban-minded or the able exploiters of talent who require the city as their field of activity. The present tendency makes necessary the development of country schools able to change the apparent emptiness of rural environment and the excessive appeal of urban excitement into a clear recognition on the part of a greater number of country people of the satisfying joys of rural stimulations.